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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

[Docket No. 151211999–6343–02]

RIN 0648-XG175

Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Northeast Multispecies Fishery; Gulf of Maine

Cod Trimester Total Allowable Catch Area Closure for the Common Pool Fishery

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; area closure.

SUMMARY: This action closes the Gulf of Maine Cod Trimester Total Allowable Catch Area to Northeast multispecies common pool vessels fishing with trawl gear, sink gillnet gear, and longline/hook gear. The closure is required by regulation because the common pool fishery is projected to have caught 90 percent of its Trimester 3 quota for Gulf of Maine cod. This closure is intended to prevent an overage of the common pool's quota for this stock.

DATES: This action is effective [*insert date of filing for public inspection with the Office of the Federal Register*], through April 30, 2018.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Spencer Talmage, Fishery Management Specialist, (978) 281-9232.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Federal regulations at § 648.82(n)(2)(ii) require the

Regional Administrator to close a common pool Trimester Total Allowable Catch (TAC) Area for a stock when 90 percent of the Trimester TAC is projected to be caught. The closure applies to all common pool vessels fishing with gear capable of catching that stock for the remainder of the trimester.

Based on catch data through April 23, 2018, the common pool fishery is projected to have caught approximately 90 percent of the Trimester 3 TAC (3.0 mt) for Gulf of Maine (GOM) cod on April 24, 2018. Projections show that catch will likely reach 100 percent of the annual quota by April 26, 2018. Effective *[insert date of filing for public inspection with the Office of the Federal Register]*, the GOM Cod Trimester TAC Area is closed for the remainder of Trimester 3, through April 30, 2018. This closure applies to all common pool vessels fishing on a Northeast multispecies trip with trawl gear, sink gillnet gear, and longline/hook gear. The GOM Cod Trimester TAC Area consists of statistical areas 513 and 514. The area reopens at the beginning of Trimester 1 of the 2018 fishing year on May 1, 2018.

If a vessel declared its trip through the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) or the interactive voice response system, and crossed the VMS demarcation line prior to *[insert date of filing for public inspection with the Office of the Federal Register]*, it may complete its trip within the GOM Cod Trimester TAC Area. A vessel that has set gillnet gear prior to *[insert date of filing for public inspection with the Office of the Federal Register]*, may complete its trip by hauling such gear.

If the common pool fishery exceeds its total quota for a stock in the 2017 fishing year, the overage must be deducted from the common pool's quota for that stock for fishing year 2018. Any uncaught portion of the common pool's total annual quota may not be carried over into the

following fishing year.

Weekly quota monitoring reports for the common pool fishery are on our website at: <http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/ro/fso/MultiMonReports.htm>. We will continue to monitor common pool catch through vessel trip reports, dealer-reported landings, VMS catch reports, and other available information and, if necessary, we will make additional adjustments to common pool management measures.

Classification

This action is required by 50 CFR part 648 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, finds good cause pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) and 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3) to waive prior notice and the opportunity for public comment and the 30-day delayed effectiveness period because it would be impracticable and contrary to the public interest.

The regulations require the Regional Administrator to close a trimester TAC area to the common pool fishery when 90 percent of the Trimester TAC for a stock has been caught. Updated catch information through April 23, 2018, only recently became available indicating that the common pool fishery is projected to have caught 90 percent of its Trimester 3 TAC for GOM cod on April 24, 2018. The time necessary to provide for prior notice and comment, and a 30-day delay in effectiveness, would prevent the immediate closure of the GOM Cod Trimester TAC Area. This would be contrary to the regulatory requirement and would increase the likelihood that the common pool fishery would exceed its trimester or annual quota of GOM cod to the detriment of this stock. This could undermine management objectives of the Northeast

Multispecies Fishery Management Plan. Fishermen expect these closures to occur in a timely way to prevent overages and their payback requirements. Overages of the trimester or annual

common pool quota could cause negative economic impacts to the common pool fishery as a result of overage paybacks deducted from a future trimester or fishing year.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: April 26, 2018.

Jennifer M. Wallace,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

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